25 years of studying New Public Management: Accomplishments and limitations

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Abstract
25 years ago, Christopher Hood made a substantial contribution to public administration research in his formulation of the concept New Public Management (NPM). In many ways, his article can be understood as an enabler of research focusing on public sector reforms. To this day, numerous articles and books have been published, discussing the concept itself and the empirical phenomenon. In celebration of this anniversary, this article revisits the current knowledge through a systematic literature review of 299 articles published between 1991 and 2016. This approach enables a meta-analysis of research published in five top-ranked international public administration journals. We identify four important themes as emerging from our review; (i) a reform with a vague intention, (ii) the limping concept, (iii) the one-sided perspective and (iv) NPM as the new norm. An important effect of this is that Hoods framework may have been curtailed, leading to a distorted knowledge-base when it comes to future studies.

Keywords
New Public Management,
1. Introduction

We believe that the vast majority of academics today agree that we do not need more texts about what New Public Management (hereafter NPM, Hood, 1991) is or more elaborations on the effects and consequences it has caused when being implemented in the public sector.

There seems to be a prevalent consensus about what the phenomenon has been and what it is (not) today (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007; Hood, 1995; Hood & Dixon, 2015; Lapsley & Knutsson, 2017; Lynn, 2001b; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Norma M. Riccucci, 2001). And even though many seem to have put the concept on a historical shelf primarily by suggesting new and emerging concepts as empirically superior (Alonso, Clifton, & Díaz-Fuentes, 2013; J. V. Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015; R. B. Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000, 2001; Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2006; Dunn & Miller, 2007; S. Osborne, 2006, 2010), we argue that there are still lessons to be learnt from the development that has characterized the public sector for several decades.

NPM has been described in very many different ways. Hood himself called the term of middle age (Hood & Peters, 2004), while others have taken a more radical stance, calling it a dead phenomenon (Dunleavy et al., 2006). The progress as described in the early 1990s has changed and today there is a vast amount of literature describing the phenomenon conceptually (Diefenbach, 2009; Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Lynn, 1998, 2001b; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017) as well as empirically (Alonso et al., 2013; Butterfield, Edwards, & Woodall, 2004; Dent, 2006; Hendriks & Tops, 2003; Page, 2005; Torres & Pina, 2004). In addition, much literature has been devoted to discussions about the effects (Butterfield et al., 2004; Dan & Pollitt, 2014; Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Thomassen, Ahaus, Van de Walle, & Nabitz, 2014; Tummers, Bekkers, & Steijn, 2009) created within public organizations. The amount of literature that has taken on NPM as a phenomenon today is, to be cautious, considerable, which has resulted in an obfuscation of the concept in empirical terms, as well as rendering
the discussion of what NPM is non-transparent (Pollitt, 2009; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Sorin & Pollitt, 2014).

Given the 25-year milestone of NPM in international journal publications, we believe that the time is ripe for a meta-analysis of what has been undertaken from an academic point of view. We believe that the concepts itself and the research published under its flag, deserves close scrutiny in order to further understand our current state of knowledge about the concept. The purpose of this article is to systematically and critically, review published research about NPM in international top tier journals. From this purpose, our review addresses two questions; firstly, what are the key achievements emanating from NPM publications over 25 years and how has it contributed to our understanding of public sector reforms? Secondly, to what extent are there limitations to NPM publications and how should these be remedied by future advances in public administration research?

As we briefly mentioned above, there are several well-written and contributing articles discussing NPM from a conceptual or empirical perspective. This study, however, constitutes a comprehensive and systematic review of NPM in international journals for a period of 25 years. As such, it is to our knowledge the first full examination of published research within the field of public administration. Through this approach, we find that NPM as a concept has been curtailed in the sense that research on performance management is given prominence, whereas market aspects are first and foremost presented and described conceptually. These findings are then related to Hood description of NPM.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section contains a brief summary of Hood's view of NPM, where we also present and argue for the distinction between management- and market-based reforms (Author, year). We then discuss our review approach and coding of articles in sections three and four. Section five contains our findings,
where we discuss the selected themes (introduced in section four). Finally, we end the article with a discussion and conclusion, elaborating on the implications for research and researchers.

2. Hoods NPM framework

As we are all quite familiar with, NPM as a concept and framework is highly diverse. Several scholars have presented well-grounded and thoroughly argued frameworks that has greatly expanded our understandings of NPM as a global phenomenon (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007; Diefenbach, 2009; Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Hood, 1991, 1995; Jackson & Lapsley, 2003; Lapsley, 2008, 2009; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Maesschalck, 2004; Pollitt, 2000; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). As an analytical framework for analyzing and understanding NPM-reforms, we will linger on Christopher Hoods’ seminal article “A public management for all seasons” (1991), as it can be understood as a beginning for publishing research about NPM specifically. Although he was certainly not alone in addressing public sector reforms influenced by a managerial connotation (cf. Aucoin, 1988; Deem, 1998; Frederickson, 1999; D. Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Pollitt, 1993; Trow, 1993), he managed to sum up the trends in a skilled manner.

As many of us now are very familiar with, he did this through the formalization of seven overlapping doctrinal components:

1. Hands-on professional management
2. Explicit standards and measures of performance
3. Greater emphasis on output controls
4. Shift to disaggregation of units in the public sector
5. Shift to greater competition in public sector
6. Stress on private-sector styles of management practice
7. Stress on greater discipline and parsimony in resource use
The strength of Hoods summation, in our opinion, is that it consists of over-lapping doctrines, rather than mutually exclusive sub-concepts, yet offers analytical power when analyzing public sector reforms. This presents researchers with a certain degree of freedom, when categorizing or thematizing different aspects of NPM empirically.

From Hoods framework, we understand NPM as being about increasing the efficiency within administration. Managerial aspects of implementing techniques and ideas that were influenced by private sector organizations are especially prevalent in doctrines one through four and seven. Within these doctrines, we understand management as gaining discretionary powers (Arnaboldi, Lapsley, & Steccolini, 2015; Kaboolian, 1998; Lapsley & Skærbæk, 2012) by which he or she can control and organize in a manner that fits with the goals and aims of the organization. Doctrines four through seven includes reforms implemented in order to create pressure for increasing efficiency through the introduction of competition (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000; Goldfinch & Wallis, 2010; Le Grand, 1991; Megginson & Netter, 2001). The already mentioned overlaps are thus most significant for doctrines four and seven. Decentralization can relate to both political and administrative decentralization (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017) whereas parsimony with public resources can be identified as a driving factor within all of the above reform types.

The separation of two sets of different, although not mutually exclusive, reform trends have been discussed by other scholars. Trow (1993) for instance, makes a distinction between soft and hard reforms. Soft reforms refer to changes of a more internal perspective, aiming at increasing efficiency of the organization. Hard reforms on the other hand, refer to increased competition and involvement of market relations within the public sector. Deem and Brehony (2005) makes a similar distinction in terms of administrative versus ideological reforms whereas Author (Year) differentiates between organizational and societal reforms. In this article, we follow this broader conceptualization of NPM by making a distinction between (1)
management based and (2) market based reforms (Author, year). Following the seven doctrines presented by Hood (1991), the two reform types can be summarized as follows in table 2.

**TABLE 2 HERE**

3. **Review approach**

Our review was undertaken in four steps. Our first step concerned a need to define and restrict the rather voluminous material available for review. As our focus was to review published research about NPM, we had to decide on how to define the concept itself. In this endeavor, we found it easier to let the authors of the publications themselves be experts on whether the publication was about NPM or not. This means that we have restrained from undertaking an initial analysis of whether or not the discussed phenomena should be categorized as a NPM-study or not and instead subdued to the authors’ explication of the concept. As a consequence, we decided to concentrate our review to five highly ranked public administration journals and select articles based on whether the authors referred to the concept NPM in title, keywords, and/or in abstracts.

Our second step concerned the selection of (i) journals and (ii) articles for our systematic review. Our purpose was to review articles from top tier international journals, meaning that we wanted to find the ‘best’ international journals publishing on the topic of NPM in public administration. However, deciding on what counts as a ‘best’ or top tier journals is not that easy. Previous studies have stated that public administration, in some sense, can be seen as a discipline with a “crisis of identity” (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2000). Faculty come from both public administration and from neighboring disciplines, and thus lacks the disciplinary focus that exists in other fields. Public administration scholars publish in public administration journals, but also in political science, management, sociology, urban studies, organizational
behavior, etc. (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2000; Van de Walle & van Delft, 2015). In order to handle this problem, our selection of international journals was done based on three different ranking systems; (i) journal impact, (ii) journal reputation and (iii) journal with NPM studies.

From Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar top publications we retrieved a list over English-language public administration journals with the highest impact factor during the last five years. The most highly ranked journals based on reputation were identified in two previous studies (Bernick & Krueger, 2010; Forrester & Watson, 1994). In both studies reputation was identified by surveying editors and editorial board members of public administration journals. Finally, Web of Science and Scopus were used in order to identify a list of journals where studies on NPM were most published. The result of the analysis can be found in Appendix A.

Out of the different rankings *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (JPART) and *Public Administration Review* (PAR) were the two journals with highest impact and reputation. *Public Administration* (PA) scores high on the Google Scholar top publications list and also when it comes to number of NPM-studies published. This is also the journal where Hood published his article on NPM in 1991. *International Review of Administrative Science* (IRAS) and *Public Management Review* (PMR) are two journals were NPM-studies are most widespread. In order to ensure a good representation of the studies on NPM we chose to include both IRAS and PMR in our selection of journals. When it comes to impact both journals also rank high. Regarding the remaining journals they either appear only on one of the lists or contain few NPM-studies.

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1 In Web of Science and Scopus the category chosen was public administration. The lists generated show the JCR-impact respectively the SCImago impact over the last five years. In Google Scholar top publications, the category chosen was public policy and administration.

2 IRAS rank no 23 on JCR, 37 on SCImago and no 10 on Google Scholar, PMR rank no 14 on JCR.
Our selection of NPM research studies published between 1991 and 2016 resulted in 330 articles. All of these articles were subjected to a close reading. 31 articles were deemed as not relevant for this study based on the fact that they picked up book reviews and articles without direct connections to NPM, leaving 299 articles for closer analysis.

TABLE 1 HERE

As a third step, the remaining 299 articles were classified by (1) reform type, (2) topic, (3) geographical location, (4) research setting, (5) research methods, and (6) research tone. This review coding framework was inspired by the framework of Shields (1997) and later used by Chenhall and Smith (2011), Dittman, Hesford, and Potter (2009) and Hoque (2014).

As a fourth step, we aimed at identifying emerging themes from the close reading of our selected articles that could benefit our current understandings of the achievements and limitations to NPM publications. In this step, we found four themes; (i) a reform with a vague intention, (ii) the limping concept, (iii) the one-sided perspective and (iv) NPM as the new norm. These themes are not exhaustive. Nevertheless, our review enables a meta-analysis of articles published on NPM over time. Our belief is that this review identifies important issues pertinent to those interested in reform ideas in general and NPM specifically, and that this review will help us detect gaps in the knowledge base surrounding NPM, and will recommend some new directions for future research. Figure 1 presents the review approach used.

FIGURE 1 HERE

4. New Public Management studies published in public administration journals

In the following section, we examine and describe the 299 articles published in the five journals that deal with NPM.
4.1. Distribution of articles by journal and over time

Table 3 presents the frequency distribution of articles on NPM published by the five journals. Between 1991 and 1996 only seven articles were published, mainly in PA. A reason might be that this is where Hoods first article on NPM were published. During this earlier period (1990s), articles on NPM was mainly discussed in three of the premier journals in public administration; PA (23), PAR (11) and PMR (18). With a slight increase in 2002-2006, NPM as a topic came to peak between 2007 and 2011. 109 of the 299 publications (37%) were published during this five-year period, and publications on NPM were during this period presented in all of the five journals. However, the number of articles between 2012 and 2016 indicates a decreased publication rate in regards of NPM. In 2016 alone, only nine articles were published.

Overall, the highest number of articles (97 or 32%) appeared in PMR followed by IRAS (71) and PA (71). It is notably that JPART has the least publications focusing on NPM (22). It was not until the late 2000s that the number of publications started to increase, however slightly, in this journal. It is interesting that the two top journals, when it comes to impact and reputation (JPART and PAR), are the two journals with the smallest number of publications on NPM. However, caution must be used in interpreting the frequency data since some journals might publish more issues per year than others.

4.2. Type of reforms

Following the outset discussed in section two, we initially made a distinction between management based and market based reform (Author, year). Although we agree that this is a

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3 PMR was founded in 2001. However, the name of the journal between 1999 and 2000 was Public Management. During this period nine articles was published on NPM.
cruder analysis of NPM-reforms, it allowed for an identification of the different types without having to deal with the problems of prevalent overlaps.

Although we initially coded the articles in accordance with this framework, we found that additional themes emerged that did not fit our division between management- and market-based reforms. For this reason, we added two additional categories to capture the articles that discussed (1) NPM in more general terms and (2) post-NPM studies. Table 4 shows the distribution of articles by type of reform and over time.

TABLE 4 HERE

Our findings indicate that NPM was presented and discussed in general terms or from a managerial perspective during the 1990s. The progression of publications from our review reveals that the managerial approach has dominated the scholarly dialogue ever since the beginning. The emphasis on market based reforms in our review began to increase in the end of the 1990s. During the 2000’s, a number of post-NPM studies occurred, indicating a new shift in the scholarly dialogue.

A closer examination of what is discussed in the management based reform studies display instruments and activities such as performance measurement, performance management, performance evaluations and focus of results (Piotrowski & Rosenbloom, 2002; Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011), but also managerialization (Croft, Currie, & Lockett, 2015), decentralization (Doolin, 2001) and accountability (Lewis & Stiles, 2004). Within the market based reform studies appear concepts such as competition (Chandler, 2002), marketization, corporatization (Lindlbauer, Winter, & Schreyögg, 2015), contracts (Prager, 2008), but also customerification (Rouillard, 1999). Decentralization appears both in management based reform studies as well as in market based reform studies (Guyomarch, 1999; Thomassen et al., 2014). This can be explained by the fact that decentralization can relate to both political and
administrative decentralization (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017) as previously mentioned in our framework.

Studies focusing on post-NPM consist mainly of studies where NPM is contrasted with something else or something new. What this new is or means is quite diffuse. Post-NPM studies describe the new in more general terms and how it differs from NPM (R. B. Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Park & Joaquin, 2012). Hence, rather than explaining what this new is, authors explain it with what it's not. The emergence of a post-NPM debate within our articles can thus be understood as embracing NPM as the norm in order to explain new phenomenon. Some examples can thus be found in concepts such as network (Considine & Lewis, 2012), collaboration (Geddes, 2012), and multi-professional teams (Andersson & Liff, 2012).

4.3. The research topic

In relation to the type of reforms found in the articles on NPM (above), we were interested in what kind of research topic had been engaged in the articles. Our main coding referred to whether it was about implementation, diffusion, use, or effects/impact of NPM. Naturally, there is a time dimension aspect to our choice of themes. It was expected that implementation studies should dominate during the earlier phases of NPM, whereas studies focusing on effect would emerge as the concept matured within the scholarly debate. During the coding phase, we added two additional categories: NPM as a concept and NPM in relation to what will come (table 5).

TABLE 5 HERE

Our review reveals that 39% of all articles during the 25-year period focused on the effects/impact of NPM. This was followed by studies focusing on the implementation of NPM reforms (23%), the diffusion of NPM (13%), and the use of different NPM-instruments (9%). The early studies focused, not surprisingly, mainly on the implementation of NPM-reforms
(Carter & Greer, 1993). Studies concentrating on effects or impact of different reforms took off in the end of the 1990s, and have since then dominated (Häikiö, 2010; Kirkpatrick & Ackroyd, 2003; Teo, Pick, Xerri, & Newton, 2016).

From the end of 1990s studies focusing on NPM in relation to what will come became more visible. Similarly, to what we could notice about post-NPM articles, we can see that NPM as a research topic becomes constructed as a norm from which another emerging phenomenon can be understood from 2002 and onwards. A closer examination of the different journals shows that NPM in relation to what will come has mainly been discussed in PMR (13 out of 20). JPART has mostly published effect studies (12 out of 22), but also studies discussing NPM as a concept (4 out of 22). Implementation studies can above all be seen in PA, IRAS and PMR (20 respective 21 and 17 out of 68).

4.4. The geographical location

Different countries display different politico-administrative regimes. This means that reforms will meet different challenges in different countries when carried out (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). Studies have shown that implementation habitats can make a huge difference to the effects yielded by a particular management change (Barrett, 2004; Hill & Hupe, 2014; Lynn, 2006; Matland, 1995; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). Even if external pressure for change is similar, both the choice of reforms to be adopted and the likelihood of implementing and spreading a certain type of reform may vary. For this study, the discussion makes it relevant to emphasize the empirical context studied in the different articles. Although conceptually identical, we argue that NPM as a whole will be received and developed differently in one national or local context compared to another.

A number of scholars argue that public administrative systems are guided either by the Rechtsstaat model or by the Anglo-Saxon model of the ‘public interest’ (Lynn, 2006; Pierre,
1995; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). A more nuanced classification of different politico-administrative systems, identifying six ‘administrative profiles’ among European states, has been presented by Kuhlmann and Wollmann (2014) and later used by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017). This study leans on this latter classification, with some minor modifications. The Central/Eastern European and South-Eastern European group has been merged into one group, and four new groups have been added in order to cover studies outside Europe; resulting in a total of ten groups. The classification used in this study is presented in table 6.

**TABLE 6 HERE**

Table 7 shows that 52 articles (17%) discuss NPM in general terms and not explicitly NPM in a certain country. Further analysis revealed that this group included mainly analytical articles or literature reviews (Lynn, 2001a; van Helden, Johnsen, & Vakkuri, 2008). However, a clear majority of the articles (31%) discussed NPM in Anglo-Saxon countries. This is perhaps not that surprising since this administrative profile is perceived as more open to the performance-driven, market-favoring ideas of NPM than other profiles. Out of the 93 studies focusing on an Anglo-Saxon perspective, 50 articles covered the UK-context, 29 articles the US and 14 Australia and/or New Zealand. Our review thus pinpoints UK as being focal for the published NPM-discussion. The domination of Anglo-Saxon studies becomes highlighted when comparing with articles focusing on other administrative profiles. We find that studies in Continental European-Napoleonic countries (15%), Continental European-Federal countries (7%), and studies in Nordic countries (7%) together barely match the Anglo-Saxon studies.

Our review furthermore reveals that only 8 percent of the studies entailed comparative analysis between different countries. This was somewhat surprising, as we would expect the comparative approach to be of specific interest to public administration scholars. Our findings furthermore indicate that NPM-reforms have mainly been an issue for western countries,
whereas Asian, South America and Central/Eastern/South-Eastern Europe either hasn’t been exposed to NPM-reforms or no articles has been focused on these contexts in the reviewed journals.

TABLE 7 HERE

A deeper analysis of the distribution of articles by empirical context over time reveals that out of 34 country-specific studies between 1991 and 2001, 19 studies (56%) where about the Anglo-Saxon context. Out of these 19 studies, 12 focused on the UK context. This shows a strong anchoring for change in form of NPM reforms in the UK in the 1990s. Earlier studies confirm this when indicating that UK is the leading case of countries embracing NPM-reforms (c.f. Christensen & Lægreid, 2011; Hood & Dixon, 2015). Between 2002 and 2006 the distribution of studies within Anglo-Saxon countries was UK (17), USA (8) and Australia/New Zealand (1). In the period 2007-2011 the distribution was UK (11), USA (13) and Australia/New Zealand (7). Finally, in 2012-2016 the distribution was UK (12), USA (7) and Australia/New Zealand (2). Our interpretation of these findings relates to the dominance that already published articles have on the academic community. Beginning in distinct UK setting, Hoods article from 1991 paved the way for more research on similar contexts, thus indicating that UKs exposure to NPM preceded the developments in e.g. the USA and Australia/New Zealand. From 2012 and forward studies on NPM reforms have once again decreased in the USA and Australia/New Zealand, whereas the interest for NPM reforms seems to keep its grip of the UK context.

Between 2007 and 2016 several studies have focused on NPM in Continental European-Napoleonic countries and among Nordic countries (Hansen, 2001; Thomassen et al., 2014; Torres & Pina, 2004). We interpret the somewhat later adoption of NPM in these settings as indications that e.g. the Rechtsstaat model resisted NPM-reforms initially. Such resistance has
been highlighted by some scholars, whereas the Nordic countries have been argued to be earlier adopters of NPM (Hood, 1995; Lapsley & Knutsson, 2017; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011)(Author, Year; Year). From 2002 and forward it becomes obvious that NPM has spread to other contexts as Africa, Asia and Central/Eastern/South-Eastern Europe, although in smaller scale.

Comparative studies or cross-country studies start to appear in 1999. However, the real boom of comparative studies can be seen from 2008 and forward (Hajnal, 2005) indicating an important field for future studies.

4.5. The research setting

In addition to analyze the empirical context it is also of interest to examine the research setting were NPM reforms are implemented. Some states are highly centralized, other decentralized, and this will affect were NPM-reforms take place. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) explains that reforms in highly decentralized states are likely to be less broad in scope and less uniform in practice than in central states. In decentralized states, different organizations are likely to want to be able to go in their own direction rather than in the same as everyone else. In centralized states, central government tends to be more involved in the service delivery than do central governments in decentralized states. This could affect whether output and results are discussed and monitored more narrowly or on a more strategic and policy level.

Overall, the distribution of past studies represented by the 299 articles in our review indicate a heavy emphasis on discussing NPM in general terms rather than related to a certain research setting (109 studies 37%) as shown in table 8. In addition, we find that articles discuss research settings on central (25%) as well as local and federal level (25%). Our review thereby reveals that there is no difference between the amounts of studies focusing on central
or local level. From this we draw the conclusion that there are no preferred research settings amongst our articles, indicating that NPM-reforms have not just been implemented in a local setting, but instead had a great impact on the public sector in general in different countries and at different levels.

A closer examination of the different geographical settings reveals that studies focusing on Asia primarily discuss NPM in central government (8 out of 15, 53%). Studies of the Nordic setting, however, discuss NPM in a local setting (38%) as well as in central government (33%). Continental European-Federal countries discuss NPM on federal (32%) and local level (37%), whereas studies of Continental European-Napoleonic countries discuss NPM both on central (32%) and local level (30%).

TABLE 8 HERE

As part of analyzing the distribution in regards to central versus federal and local government, we furthermore examined the distribution across more specific public services. In this endeavor, we found that the articles focusing on the health care sector stands out with 13%. Other popular choices of research settings are social service (11%), education (9%), and the police force (9%).

Studies of NPM in health care settings mainly stem from Anglo-Saxon countries (12 out of 25), Continental European-Napoleonic countries (5) and the Nordic countries (3) with a clear majority from a UK context (10) (Dent, 2006; Gallego, 2000). NPM-reforms in the educational sector are discussed in studies from Anglo-Saxon countries (12 out of 17), mainly UK (8), but also the USA (2) and Continental European-Napoleonic countries (2) (Chandler, 2002; Fay & Zavattaro, 2016). The police force sector is represented by studies from UK (4) and Australia (3) (Collier, 2004; Dupont, 2005) whereas studies of social services stems from UK (8) and the USA (5) but also from Continental European-Napoleonic countries (3) and
from Asia (2). NPM-reforms in security and with a specific focus on street-level bureaucrats mainly come from the USA (Norma M Riccucci & Thompson, 2008; Tummers et al., 2009). The findings once again indicate the dominance of published articles taking a UK context, indicating it to be heavily influenced by NPM-reforms on all levels and among different public services.

A closer examination at publications of NPM in different research settings over time (table 8) show that articles published in 1991-2001 mainly discussed NPM in general terms (25 out of 51, 49%) whereas articles specifically focusing on different public services as described above became common first in the 2000s.

Scrutinizing the content of articles discussing reforms of public services, we found a distinct difference in regards to how management based versus market based reforms was present (see table 9). Our findings indicate that in discussions about the health care sector and the police force, management based reforms dominated. For example Grosso and Van Ryzin (2012) discuss the implementation of a performance framework for the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK resulting in practitioners’ efforts to measure, report, and improve quality and its effects on citizens’ attitudes, whereas Butterfield et al. (2004) examine the impact of performance management techniques in form of key performance indicators in the UK police service. When it comes to issues of decentralization, we found a wide distribution across different public services. For example, Doolin (2001) describe the introduction of clinical business units as an attempt to increase the clinical participation in management in New Zealand public hospitals.

Market-based reforms on the other hand proved to be somewhat different. According to our review, we mainly found articles discussing marketization and consumer rights within education and social services. In education, the focus on competition gives rise to discussions
of marketization and strategic branding initiatives (Fay & Zavattaro, 2016), whereas decentralization and consumerism was evident within social services (Thomassen et al, 2014).

TABLE 9 HERE

An interesting finding is that whereas the consumer and its right becomes present in the social service and the education sector, the discussion within the health care do not seem to focus on any presumed customers. Instead internal efficiency in form of improving performance is more present in the debate. The distinction between management-based and market-based reforms is thereby linked to the research setting. Our review thus indicates that certain sectors are dominated by different reform types. We will return to this in our discussion below.

4.6. The research methods

In an attempt of understanding more about how NPM-studies have been undertaken, we examined the methods approach as described in the articles (see table 10). We found that three approaches dominated our review: case/field study methods (26%), analytical studies (26%) and archival studies (24%). Together these three approaches amount to 76 percent of the total number of included articles. Surveys (16%) and mixed methods approach (4%) followed thereafter.

TABLE 10 HERE

Our review furthermore reveals that scholars have engaged in qualitative approaches such as case/field study designs in order to obtain in-depth understanding of the effects of NPM. For instance, Prager (2008) describes the contracting operations of a city in USA and conclude that the city manager has turned into a contract administrator and monitor rather than a manager spending his time on management issues. Gallego (2000) examine the impact of the introduction of purchaser/provider separation in health authority in Catalonia on the budget structures of the agencies affected.
Several of the articles using archive data have investigated the spread, implementation or effects of policies. It is among these that we can find the majority of comparative studies. For example, Kuhlmann (2010) analyzes and compare the effects from an NPM-agenda at a local level in Germany, France and Italy. She concludes that the reforms have only partly succeeded, and that the ‘Neo-Weberian’ model of legalist and managerial elements still persists. Verhoest, Bouckaert, and Peters (2007) examine the tension between specialization and coordination in organizations and programs in four countries. They conclude that autonomy and fragmentation, as a consequence to the NPM ideology, has been a substantial factor of the subsequent attempts to increase integrated organizational structures.

Articles with an analytical approach are predominantly focused on discussions about the effects or implementation of NPM reforms. For example, Aberbach and Christensen (2005) theoretically and empirically analyzes the implications of NPMs emphasis of customer sovereignty and argue that there are several problems with the consumer orientation in administration. Citizens as consumers de-emphasis the collective tradition and weaken control by political leaders over administration.

A closer look at the different journals reveals that IRAS and PAR tend to published articles using an analytical approach (37% respectively 40%), whereas PA published case/field studies (45%). PMR were broader in the sense that they published articles using different methods, such as archival approach (30%), case/field studies (22%), analytical approach (17.5%) and survey-based findings (17.5%).

4.7. The research tone

Finally, we explored the research tone explicated in the articles. With research tone, we mean the stance that authors’ take in regards to NPM as a phenomenon. Within academia at large, there is growing discontent with many of the NPM-reforms, especially the effects, implying a
critical stance. Our review, however, indicates that a majority of the published articles (55%) explicate a neutral tone (see table 11). However, in 54 articles (18%) it becomes obvious that the authors take a positive stance towards NPM. A critical standpoint can be seen in 80 articles (27%).

**TABLE 11 HERE**

The journal where authors to the highest degree have taken a positive tone towards NPM turns out to be in PA. It is also in this journal were most of the critical articles are to be found, making it the journal with most active stances for or against NPM. Most positive towards NPM, in relation to the total number of NPM-articles published in the journal, are the articles published in JPART.

A closer examination of how the articles with a certain standpoint are distributed over time shows that the number of articles with a certain standpoint takes off in 1998 and peaks between 2006 and 2008. Our review furthermore reveals that articles with a critical stance has mainly studied the effects of NPM (50%), whereas the distribution amongst articles with a positive tone varies between studying implementation (33%) or the effects of different NPM-reforms (30%). These findings illustrate how hard it is to anticipate the effects of NPM-reforms, but also that the effects can be interpreted differently by different groups and individuals.

Our review furthermore indicates that the type of reform and the research tone coincide to a point. Articles discussing management based reforms were more commonly discussed together with an explicit stance (51% of the critical articles and 49% of the positive articles). An interesting, but perhaps not surprising, finding is that none of the articles discussing post-NPM explicated a positive stance towards NPM. Since most of the articles discussing post-
NPM are quite clear that the new reform-ideas are different from, sometimes even in opposition to, older ideas, the tone also becomes more critical.

5. Knowledge gained from existing studies on NPM
During the last 25 years NPM has been introduced as a concept capturing an empirical phenomenon, saluted as a rational and logical way of refining the public sector, as well as criticized for its consequences for citizens’ and employees. Whereas some nations have been eager to reform its governments, other has come to the point to declare its brake up with NPM (Regeringens proposition, 2014). As this article shows, the work on NPM is extensive and broad, covering qualitative and descriptive field studies as well as analytical and archival work. It reports on both implementation, diffusion and on effects of NPM reforms, and analyzes NPM in general terms as well as in central and local settings and within different public services. We have found it very difficult to pinpoint a specific management accounting and control devise that is more common than any else within the scope of our review. It is furthermore difficult to state that a specific part of the public sector has been more exposed to NPM than others. Our review confirms the dominant understanding that NPM is a global phenomenon (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011, 2017), sweeping across Europe, North America, Oceania, Asia, Africa or South America almost pandemic (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000). Based on our extensive review of NPM research, however, we argue that four major themes stand out. These are; (i) a reform with a vague intention; (ii) the limping concept, (iii) the one-sided perspective, and: (iv) NPM as the new norm. We elaborate on these themes below.

A reform with a vague intention

One of the primary factors for why NPM emerged has been described as the incompatibleness between growing public expenditure and national competitiveness in an era of globalization (Hood, 1995; Pollitt & Dan, 2011). The size and scope of the public sector had to be reduced
and business-like management practices introduced in order to contribute towards efficiency (Hood, 1991, 1995; Power, 1997). However, as our systematic literature review shows; efficiency can and has been interpreted in different ways in different settings. On the one hand authors discuss internal efficiency in terms of productivity efforts to cut costs and improve performance (Doolin, 2001; Ford & Ihrke, 2015). On the other hand, a discussion around external efficiency focusing on improving customer satisfaction can be seen among the articles. For example, Thomassen et al. (2014) investigate the implementation of service charters and how it affect customer satisfaction and quality. In another study, citizen’s perception on performance information of the health care providers was investigated (Grosso & Van Ryzin, 2012).

The two different interpretations of efficiency carry implications for how, when and why studies of NPM are undertaken and how they are posited in international journals. Our review reveals that although the different interpretations of efficiency can be found in all public sectors, it seems as if the discussion within the health care has focused more on productivity and performance monitoring whereas the social service and the education sector has directed their attention towards attracting customers. This means that the intention of NPM reforms seems to be different in different social services.

Hood (2011) concluded that after two decades of research on NPM we still know very little whether and how far NPM worked on cutting costs and improving efficiency. Pollitt and Dan (2011) continue this critic by claiming that our solid, scientific knowledge of the outcomes of NPM thinking and activities is very limited. Hood and Dixon (2015) made an important contribution in this aspect, when they evaluated the promise of making a government that worked better and cost less. Nevertheless, when the meaning of efficiency vary it is perhaps not surprising that it is challenging to measure the outcome of NPM. Decreasing public spending isn’t always aligned with increasing customer satisfaction and vice versa. This
means that the debate whether and how far NPM has worked on improving efficiency within public services will continue as long as the intentions with NPM reforms are vague.

*The limping concept*

Hood (1991) original framework for NPM consisted of seven overlapping administrative doctrines, ranging from the introduction of professional management and performances measurement, to increasing competition and disaggregating public sector units. His formulation of NPM as an umbrella-concept has encouraged academics to embody different empirical phenomenon under the umbrella with such a pace that the concept has been criticized for including so much that it practically means nothing (Pollitt, 2009).

Even though our systematic review shows difficulties to pinpoint a specific management control devise that is more common than others, it indicates that there is predominance for publishing articles focusing on management-based reforms. Furthermore, our review indicates that management-based reforms were primarily focused on discussing performance-related control. Only one fifth of all our selected articles focused on market-based reforms. From our close reading of 299 articles in five top tier public administration journals, the pattern is clear: NPM has become a limping concept, focusing mainly on one-type of reform ideas.

Hence, we claim that the full understanding of NPM as an analytical concept and framework containing both management and market-based reforms is not fully visible among the published articles. Instead it seems as if NPM over time has become equal to performance measurement, performance management and performance evaluations. Our systematic review reveals that NPM may be criticized for including everything. However, the underlying understanding and manifestation of the concept in the public sector seems to be focused on performance management.
Hood once presented NPM as a large umbrella. However, our review shows that out of the seven doctrinal components, only two (doctrine three and four) are that what primarily constitutes NPM research.

*The one-sided perspective*

NPM was “born” in an Anglo-Saxon context, but has since the early 1990s spread around the globe and become a global phenomenon (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011, 2017). Our review shows how the phenomenon has influenced not just the public sector in western countries, but also the public sector in Asia, Africa, and South America.

Still, studies focusing on NPM for the last 25 years have to a very large extent been dominated by an Anglo-Saxon perspective. Literature as well as empirical explorations has been focused on discussing the developments in UK and the USA especially. Although we recognize that this may be an effect of the residence of the journals, we argue that this presents a one-sided perspective when it comes to our current knowledge of NPM-reforms.

Despite the fact that country specific knowledge regarding the spread and the effects of NPM most certainly exists in other literature, it is slightly problematic that Anglo-Saxon studies are so over representative when it comes to top-ranked international public administration journals. Reading and refereeing to top tier publications regarding NPM may present scholars with a problem of contextualizing studies outside of Anglo-Saxon locations. Studies undertaken in Nigeria, Ukraine or Finland, will all position their empirical findings against studies from an entirely different constitutional context. As we have argued extensively previously in the article, politico-administrative regimes matter a great deal (Barrett, 2004; Hill & Hupe, 2014; Lynn, 2006; Matland, 1995; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). There is a risk this may be neglected when reviewing the existing literature on NPM in top tier international journals.
NPM as the new norm

Studies on NPM took off in the second half of the 1990s and peaked between 2007 and 2011. Since then, the interest to publish on NPM in the included top tier journals seems to have dropped. Coincidently, this falls into the same time period in which Hood and Peters (2004) named NPM a middle-aged concept and when Dunleavy et al. (2006) exclaimed it to be dead. Should this recline in published articles be understood as an indication of NPM being just another fad? We argue that this is not the case. Quite contrary, the 25 years with NPM in public administration journals has carried a great impact on the literature discussing reforms within the public sector. Such an impact that we argue it has been manifested as the new norm within public administration. Understanding reforms and developments after the emergence of NPM in public administration literature as a norm implies that it becomes the backdrop against which newer reforms are compared.

Whereas the early articles discuss NPM in relation to public administration (Lynn, 1998, 2001a), articles debating post-NPM seems to relate “the new” to what NPM stands for (Andresani & Ferlie, 2006; Dunleavy et al., 2006; Hartley, Butler, & Benington, 2002; Kickert, 2003; S. Osborne, 2006). The “new”, whether it’s called New Public Governance (S. Osborne, 2006), New Public Service (J. V. Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015; R. B. Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000) or Public Value Management (Shaw, 2013) discusses holism sooner than decentralization, network rather than management, citizens participation before customers, and trust instead of performance evaluation. Some authors claim that NPM is not a new paradigm, but instead the result of a gradual changes (Page, 2005). However, from the way that the concept has been used, especially when discussing post-NPM, it is obvious what a denominator it has developed into within the public administrative debate. Today’s public sector is built on NPM standards. We speak the NPM language, act like managers (Author, year) and focus on measuring performance in different ways. Neither politicians, civil
servants, nor professional groups seem to have been able to avoid the term or its manifestations. As emerging concepts essentially becomes legitimized as being different from NPM, we understand this break as a break from a dominating norm. The new suggests something different from ‘normal’, and the normal is NPM.

6. Dilemmas and directions for the future, a concluding remark
In this article, we have discussed the progress of research focusing on NPM. We have done this, by undertaking a systematic literature review of 299 articles, published between 1991 and 2016. This provided us with a basis for analyzing 25 years of published knowledge about what constitutes NPM and what we now know about the phenomenon. We argue that this article contributes to existing literature in at least two ways.

Firstly, the twofold interpretations of efficiency that can be seen in the review suggest that the ambition or intention with NPM-reform is vague. It is claimed efficiency is the target, but what we actually mean when we refer to efficiency seems to differ between different public services.

Second, NPM as a concept is characterized by a sever limp and a one-sided perspective. As we discussed in the previous section, NPM has primarily come to be about management-related reforms. More specifically, it is understood empirically as performance-related reforms. This means that NPM as a versatile concept has come to be truncated in the sense that does not reflect the multiplicity of reforms as discussed by Hood (1991). Together with the vague intention of NPM it seems as if NPM-reforms primarily have focused on means (performance measurement) rather than specific objectives. This story has also primarily been told from the Anglo-Saxon perspective.

As a final note, we want to use our review in order to look forward. We believe, in contrast with a number of scholars, that NPM is still an important concept that has to be used in order
to understand developments within the public sector. What we can learn from this study is that it is important to have clear goals with our reforms; otherwise it will be hard to evaluate the effects of it. Also, it can be problematic to stare us blind on the means (performance measurement). Means without ends will leave the public sector in the dark. Veni, vidi, vici. NPM came, saw, and conquered, but it certainly haven’t fall in total forgetfulness. Instead it is the present norm in public administration and the norm we compare with when suggesting changes.

References


TABLE 1  Articles published on NPM by public administration journal

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TABLE 2  Two reform types

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<td>6. Stress on private-sector styles of management practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Emphasis on output control</td>
<td>4. Disaggregation and decentralization (markets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Disaggregation and decentralization (street-level bureaucracy)</td>
<td>7. Parsimony in resource use</td>
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TABLE 3  Distribution of articles by journal

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TABLE 4  Distribution of articles by type of reforms

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### TABLE 5  Distribution of articles by research topic

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<td><strong>65</strong></td>
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### TABLE 6  Administrative profiles

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Europe/EU</td>
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Extensively adapted from Kuhlmann and Wollman (2014) and Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017), with own additions.
### TABLE 7  Distribution of articles by geographical location and over time

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<td><strong>65</strong></td>
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<td><strong>74</strong></td>
<td><strong>299</strong></td>
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### TABLE 8  Distribution of articles by research setting and over time

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<td><strong>116</strong></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
<td><strong>302</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 9  Public service and reform ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public services</th>
<th>Reform ideas</th>
<th>Selected references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

* The total number of studies is higher than 100% since two studies discuss and compare NPM-reforms in healthcare and educations in the same article and one study discuss health care and the police force in the same article.
Health care

Social Service
Service charters, decentralization, performance measurement, consumer rights. Carter & Greer (1993); Condrey, Purvis & Slava (2001); McGuire (2001); Soss, Fording & Schram (2011)

Education
Competition of students, focus on branding, performance-based funding, evaluation of research, transparent costing, focus on results and performance. Chandler (2002); Talib (2003); Lewis & Stiles (2004); Fay & Zavattoro (2016)

Police

TABLE 10  Distribution of articles by research methods used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case/field study</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental/modeling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 11  Research tone in articles by journal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Critical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRAS</td>
<td>55% (39)</td>
<td>18% (13)</td>
<td>27% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JPART</td>
<td>64% (14)</td>
<td>23% (5)</td>
<td>14% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>41% (29)</td>
<td>24% (16)</td>
<td>35% (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAR</td>
<td>66% (25)</td>
<td>13% (5)</td>
<td>21% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMR</td>
<td>60% (58)</td>
<td>14% (14)</td>
<td>26% (25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1  Literature review approach

General topic

Review aim

Review sources:
- Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory
- Public Administration Review
- Public Administration
- International Review of Administrative Sciences
- Public Management Review

Classification and coding

Type of reforms  Topics  Geographical locations  Research settings  Methods  Research tone

Analysis

Accomplishments  Limitations
### Appendix A  Public administration journals: impact, reputation and number of NPM studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal Impact</th>
<th>Journal Reputation</th>
<th>NPM studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory</td>
<td>Administrative Science Quarterly</td>
<td>Public Administration Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Policy Analysis and Management</td>
<td>Journal of European Public Policy</td>
<td>Public Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Studies Journal</td>
<td>Educational Administrative Quarterly</td>
<td>Policy Studies Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Journal of Policy Analysis and Management</td>
<td>Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Review of Administrative Science</td>
<td>Public Management Review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>International Journal of Public Sector Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Journal of Public Administration Review</td>
<td>Public Administration Review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>